

History: the Chamber of Commerce  
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On October 18, 1908, some farsighted citizens of Athabasca got together and organized a Board of Trade. At almost the first meeting the Board of Trade took up the railway question.

On January 12, 1909 the Board of Trade held its first annual meeting. Wm. Leslie Wood was elected President, Isaie Gagnon as 1st Vice President, J. L. Lessard as 2nd Vice President, James H. Wood as 3rd Vice President, and Lance T. Smith as Secretary/Treasurer. Four committees were also formed:

- 1) Promotion of Industrial and Commercial Enterprises
- 2) Civic Interests
- 3) Transportation
- 4) Publicity

Each committee had a chairman and four members.

One of the first issue the Board of Trade took up was the railway and from reports in the local newspapers, it appears at every opportunity promoted, petitioned and drove for it to be started.

The 1910 executive consisted of: Wm. Leslie Wood, President, I. Gagnon, 1st Vice Present, J.L. Lessard, 2nd Vice-President, A.L. Sawle, Secretary.

During 1910, the Board distributed hundreds of copies of a pamphlet they had produced, promoting this area as the ideal site to settle - homesteading or commercial.

Their efforts <sup>resulted in</sup> experienced great interest in this area from others across Canada and the United States.

This article was found in a 1910 issue of the Northern News, Athabasca's local newspaper at that time:

"A deputation of the Press from Eastern Canada and the United States, composed of 27 leading journalists, will pass through the landing on the 28th. The Board nominated a committee to entertain the visiting journalists and arrange a suitable reception."

The 1911 executive consisted of: J.H. Wood, President, Secretary Nancekivell. Vice-Presidents unknown.

It appears 1911 was the first year the Board of Trade sent an exhibit of local produce and literature to the Edmonton Exhibition. At the annual meeting in January 1912, outgoing President J.H. Wood spoke of the great achievements the board made during the past year - securing roads for the area, getting telegraph service, having pamphlets printed and distributed promoting the town and area and ~~of them~~ working closely with town council in improving the town. He even went onto say "had the board not been in existence the town would not yet be enjoying many of the improvements it has secured." This was taken from the local newspaper.

The 1912 executive consisted of: A.L. Sawle, President, 1st Vice-President- I. Gagnon, 2nd Vice-President H.F. Cull, 3rd Vice-President, G. Hees.

In February 1912 the board held its first annual banquet and many optimistic speeches about Athabasca's future were made. I just want to share a couple<sup>of</sup> quotes from the newspaper article reporting about its success:

The President from his opening speech remarked " Let us all work together for the goal of our board, which is working in the

interests of Athabasca Landing; anything that benefits Athabasca Landing will benefit each and every one of us."

Another remark by the President " We are now a chartered town, but do not let us be content with that, we want to be a city, and a city to be proud of." He later went on to say "In boosting out town we must not lose sight of the surrounding district which is to support out future city."

Mr. R.C. Farrell spoke on Publicity at this same meeting and the newspaper reported him stating " I can picture Athabasca Landing in the near future as a large city with its factories, shipbuilding plants, elevators and mills. I can see on the bank across the river a magnificent CNR hotel looking as majestic as the Chateau Frontinac at Quebec, a railway station with daily trains going and coming from Fort McMurray, Lac La Biche, Pelican, Wabisca, Battleford, Edmonton, Grouard and Peace River Crossing. I can see wholesale houses distributing merchandise to all these points and if the citizens continue to elect each year progressive and optimistic mayors and aldermen, we will see a city with the most completed and up to date systems of municipal owned street railway through its wide streets, waterworks, and sewerage and electric lights in Western Canada. And these are not dreams, gentlemen, for can we not offer to the manufacturer; raw material, cheap power, fuel and sites and shipping facilities. To the wholesalers we offer these same facilities, owing to the strategic position of Athabasca Landing in the centre of a great district with a great purchasing power. To the farmer we offer good land, good climate, good markets, churches, schools and to achieve this success we must

assist in every way possible the good work carried on by the Athabasca Landing Board of Trade."

The railway did reach Athabasca Landing in 1912, and regular service was started in September 1912. Water transportation doubled in 1912.

A brick yard established itself near the landing and the lumber industry was booming. The Board of Trade reported there were over 2000 men engaged in lumber camps around the landing.

Many new buildings were erected, businesses and residences.

Work progressed on the waterworks and sewage system for the town and street lighting of natural gas was installed in 1912.

The 1913 executive consisted of: A.L. Sawle - President, Vice-Presidents - Messrs. Cull, Gagnon, and Hees, Secretary - unknown.

During 1913 the Board dealt with the following issues:

- the need for a land registry office here
- an immigration hall
- post office facilities
- they did a census of population for the town
- produced two more pamphlets
- distributed Athabasca buttons
- ferry service

1914 executive consisted of: President - J.P. Evans. Secretary and Vice-Presidents - unknown.

The 1915 executive consisted of: President - J.P. Evans, Vice-Presidents - A.C. McKay, J.D. Hamilton, L. Menard. Secretary - unknown.

In 1915 the Board began admitting farmers to the Board of Trade at

a nominal fee. It was also the <sup>time</sup>(same) they discussed closing down due to financial difficult. Shortly after this, the board did become inactive. Some reports say it was partly due to the antagonizing <sup>12</sup> relationship between the board and town.

In June 1917, the board of trade held a re-organizing meeting, adopting the old bylaws. J.P. Evans was elected Chair and C. Nancekivell as Secretary. The Board of Trade again took up the issue of roads in the area, but this time also showed more interest in the agricultural section of the area and promoted agriculture developments and improvements.

Between 1921 and 1926 the board again became non-active. It started up again in 1927. In 1928 the board had an exhibit at the Edmonton fair, and held a bench show in August, held a seed fair in November and secured a newspaper for the town.

In February 1929 the Board of trade had 224 farmer members and by April the number increased to 430. It was reported that George Meadowcraft personally signed up 387 member himself that year. Transportation was still an issue with the Board of Trade and, in March of 1929, the board sent a delegation to Edmonton to petition for <sup>a</sup> bridge across the river.

In 1930 the Board of Trade affiliated with the Canadian Chamber of Commerce.

In 1930 the board put exhibits into both Calgary and Edmonton exhibitions. They received first prize in Edmonton and second prize in Calgary. That year they also received the grand championship cup for the best 10 acres of wheat in the whole province. 1931 was the last year the board put an exhibit into the Edmonton Exhibition.

In 1933 the Board of Trade again slipped into a state of non-action due to the depression and didn't become active again until 1936. It retained its former name The Athabasca and District Board of Trade, adopted the old bylaws and set membership fees at \$1.00.

From 1936 to 1949 the board worked on the following issues:

- gravelling of highway 2
- encouraging more industries to establish here
- getting an airstrip
- getting a community hall
- looked into district health plans to provide more adequate medical and hospital facilities
- agricultural needs
- sponsored a library

In October 1948 the board erected a large sign on highway 2, near Westlock to direct traffic going to Alaska to come through Athabasca. The sign was 12 feet by 8 feet and the cost was \$82.86. In March 1950 the board discarded the old constitution and bylaws. New ones were drafted and adopted.

1954 was the first year the Board sponsored its halloween party. In January 1955, the board changed its name to Athabasca<sup>District - see 95.34</sup> Chamber of Commerce, and approved changes to the constitution. This same year the Chamber of Commerce started holding Town and Country meetings. In 1957, the Chamber of Commerce sent a delegation to Edmonton to see the Minister of Transportation about getting a highway to Calling Lake.

The Chambers achievements during the 1960s included:

- getting a resident magistrate.

- welcome sign
- a picnic site
- a liquor store
- christmas lights
- continuing support for a highway to Calling Lake

In September 1966, the Chamber hosted a "Ladies night" honouring 7 business women. At this time there were 70 licensed businesses and only 7 conducted outrightly by women. The women honoured were: Dr. Brown, Ethel Sauer, Lena Marchesi, Evelyn Rogers, Helen Shaw, Rita Birkigt and Ann Duniece.

This is were I will end with the Chambers history. The 70s till present is still present in many of our minds.

The Chamber continued to made great achievements and provide support to the town and surrounding area during the 70s and 80s and from all reports appears to be still on the road of success.

Since it formation, in 1908 to present day, we can clearly see its success has been due to its membership. Its an organization, which has risen up over and over again throughout the years and their difficult~~ies~~

The above information was found in the newspaper clipping files at the Athabasca Archives. Much more information is contained in the files.

